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ABSTRACT

A method of facilitating leisure reading time in the classroom is described here. It encourages leisure reading as a natural, uninterrupted process at school, so students may see how enjoyable reading is and transfer those positive feelings to reading at home. Each Wednesday, junior high school students in Centerville, Indiana, spend an average of 12 minutes of class time in uninterrupted reading. Students read magazines and books they bring to class or they may check out a book from those provided by the teacher. Newspapers are also furnished weekly through a "Newspapers in Education" program of the Richmond, Indiana newspaper, "The Palladium Item." A "Read a Marathon" contest is used to encourage and to measure seventh-grade student participation, with the top 3 readers winning $20, $15, or $10 gift certificates from a local athletic store. Teachers from all subject areas in the middle school/junior high curriculum might consider providing time for students to read materials of their own choosing. (CR)

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Getting Over the Hump—
Wednesday Reading

By

Mr. Tim Perry

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GETTING OVER THE HUMP --- WEDNESDAY READING

By Mr. Tim Perry

As I reflect upon the 1996-1997 school year at Centerville Junior High School in Centerville, IN, I now realize how important my summer, professional reading was to me. One of the many articles I perused during the summer of 1996 was one that appeared in an edition of the JOURNAL OF READING. The article, entitled "Turning on turned off students: Using newspapers with senior high remedial readers," planted a seed that blossomed into a beautiful, prospering plant of literacy! In the summer of 1996 when I read and reacted to this article, I was hoping to, in the upcoming school year and beyond, 1) encourage my students to read and have them receive assistance from parents to help nurture reading at home; 2) realize how I could better use not only newspapers, but also magazines instructively in my classes; 3) have my idea confirmed about newspapers being included in my curriculum. Before the summer of 1996, I was of the opinion as a language arts teacher that if students wanted free, leisure reading time, they could find time on their own. However, I now see the importance of facilitating leisure reading time. Leisure reading time must be a natural, uninterrupted process at school so students may see how enjoyable it is and transfer those positive feelings to reading outside of school! My question, then, that I hope to answer throughout this paper is, "If given ample time in class with a variety of reading materials from which to choose, will my low, middle, and high performing students be motivated to read?"

I would like to continue with an excerpt form a journal I kept during the 1995-1996 school year:

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> "John", a young, very bright seventh grade student, sits in his second period English class on a chilly February morning. As he and the other students in the class are reminded by their teacher of the ongoing reading contest at their school, "John" seems to chuckle

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> and then smiles. "Remember! This contest will end the day the Boston Marathon is run in April." The teacher continues, "The forms are back here and as you keep track of the time you read, remember that for every four hours you read, that means you have read a marathon. The contest started, if you remember, in November, the day of the Columbus, OH, marathon and ends on that Monday in April. I haven't had many of you people participate yet so get these forms and keep track of the time you have read." During the transitional time. . ."John" smiled once again like he had done previously and said to his cronies around him, "I don't read; do you guys?". . .(This) happened in my language arts class in February of 1996. From what I heard "John" say to his peers at that point in my class that winter morning, he obviously did not like to read, and he didn't read unless he had to. I know for a fact, though, that Josh could read and read well. . .So what's wrong? At the end of that reading contest in April (of '96), approximately eight students out of 135 had turned in a sheet, and they were all girls. I was frustrated, but I handled it by thinking I had tried my best.

Well, I obviously did not try my best. This year on Wednesdays in my classes we would "Get over the hump(day, Wednesday) with a lump of something YOU want to read." We would take, on average, about twelve minutes for uninterrupted reading time. The students knew, no matter what, that they would be given time on every Wednesday to leisurely read an item of their own choosing. The students who liked to read would obviously remember that on Wednesdays they would be given an opportunity to read, and they would have a book or magazine with them as they entered my classroom. Here are a few items I saw this past year brought in by students to read: SEIN LANGUAGE by Jerry Seinfeld, W.W.F. wrestling magazines, many GOOSEBUMPS books by R.L. Stine, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED and TEEN magazines to name only a few. What did we do with those students who, surprise, surprise, did not bring anything to read? I provided a "Lumps of Something to Read" table (this table replaced the book tree that use to house several books in a very unattractive way) that acted as the classroom library. I would place books there that students could check out and would change the books every two weeks so students could be exposed to a variety of books. The students liked the books and

checked them out quite often.

After about the first three Wednesdays this past year, I began to notice students, especially my low performing students, were not using the time to read wisely. I had recently received a letter from the Richmond, IN, newspaper the PALLADIUM ITEM. They offer a Newspapers in Education program where they will send a set of classroom copies one day each week. So I made a call to a Mr. Howell in charge of the Newspapers in Education program. That call was probably the smartest thing I have done as a language arts teacher! Thursday of that week in September and every Thursday for the remainder of the school year, twenty-five copies of Thursday's PALLADIUM ITEM were delivered to the main office for me and my students. Those students that were not enjoying the novels and other reading materials I provided definitely enjoyed perusing the PALLADIUM ITEM from that previous Thursday. "Arthur" and "Ken," two young men who were definitely low performing students (according to test scores and previous grades in their educational career) in my second period class (this is the class where low performing, special needs students are mainstreamed, and the resource teacher assists me and her students each day), have a love for cars. "Arthur" and "Ken" would usually turn to the classifieds and discover what cars and car parts were for sale. They were spending the time reading, and, most importantly, they were reading something that was very interesting to them. Those Wednesdays were very important to "Arthur" and "Ken" as well as all of my students, because as stated in that article, "Turning on turned off students: Using newspapers with senior high remedial readers," "Giving students the freedom to choose what they read was the key."

I remember one Wednesday this past year, our principal decided he wanted to visit

classrooms throughout the day informally. He showed up to my fourth period class and was able to participate in our silent reading time. As we often do following reading time, I'll give students and opportunity to share with their group (students sit at tables in groups of four) and with their class something from their reading. Our principal definitely underscored the importance of leisure reading time when he discussed with his group and then with the class information about the article he was reading. I was very pleased that our principal decided to surprise us with a visit on "hump" day!

As mentioned in the excerpt from my journal, the 1995-1996 school year was the first for the seventh grade "Read a Marathon" contest. In its first year, only about eight students participated because I did not allow class time for leisure reading. With implementing the Wednesday reading time this past year, all of my seventh graders participated (I am the only seventh grade language arts teacher at our junior high. . .obviously, it is a rather small junior high school consisting of approximately 250 seventh and eighth graders). When the contest began, on Sunday, November 10, 1996 (the running of the Columbus, OH, marathon), students were asked to, on those Wednesdays, retrieve their "Read a Marathon" contest sheets from their notebooks or from their portfolios. We would record the time we read on those Wednesdays throughout the contest. If a student was not intrinsically motivated to read, the contest would hopefully motivate them extrinsically. The top three readers would win $20, $15, or $10 gift certificates from a local athletic store. I ran the Columbus, OH, marathon in 1995 in just under four hours. So I determined that for every four hours a student read, h/she had read a marathon! These are the totals in hours and minutes for my six classes' reading in and out of class from November 10,

1996, to April 27, 1997:

1st. period: 87 hrs., 23 mins.	4 Th period: 72 hrs., 4 mins.
2nd period: 111 hrs., 13 mins.	5th period: 110 hrs., 48 mins.
3rd period: 215 hrs., 39 mins.	7th period: 272 hrs., 15 mins.

The third place winner finished with 27 marathons (108 hrs.); the second place winner finished with 32 marathons (128 hrs.); the first place winner finished with 54 marathons read (216 hrs.)! I was able to present these students their gift certificates on our end-of-school awards program, and the entire student body honored them with energetic plaudits!

Before the summer of 1996, I wouldn't have even been able to address my research question because I would not get beyond the first six words. "They can't get ample time in class for that ; I have specifics I must cover in the curriculum! They can read on their own!" I previously thought. With assistance from various professional readings and support from administration and the PALLADIUM ITEM, I discovered this past year that if students are given a plethora of reading materials from which to choose, they will read and enjoy what THEY HAVE CHOSEN to read. In closing, I do believe all subject area teachers from the junior high/middle school level to the secondary level should consider providing time for students to read materials of their own choosing. Those teachers should realize that for students to be able to experience success in their science, social studies, math, etc. classes, then students must be able to enjoy reading and comprehend what they do read. Reading is the core to all subject areas! As Dr Carl B. Smith notes in his BOOKTHINKING FOR YOUNG ADULTS, a person who is widely read will be able to handle the ups and downs of life. I do believe, now, I am preparing my students to be literate, productive, thinking members of society who can handle all of those vicissitudes in life!

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